

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to you regarding the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the immediate need for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to issue a nationwide waiver to temporarily suspend recipient eligibility verification requirements for food banks. The COVID-19 virus has been classified as a pandemic, and as such, many states have issued orders to “shelter in place”. As a result, businesses have closed, and many Americans have found themselves temporarily unemployed and struggling to afford basic necessities. These unprecedented circumstances are straining the nation’s food banks that are grappling with greater demand while subsequently facing losses of donations and volunteers.

This simultaneous decrease in food donations and increase in demand will likely lead to significant inventory deficits, in as soon as four weeks. In order to meet this new demand, food banks are relying more so on food provided by the federal government. Yet in order to distribute these foods, food banks must also collect certain information such as the recipient’s name, address, household size and income. These requirements are adding additional pressures to an already struggling food assistance system facing a sudden increase in demand. Moreover, many food banks do not have personal protective equipment, and are therefore unable to protect their staff and volunteers during the collection of recipient information. We understand that some states have already submitted plans to temporarily suspend these requirements in order to distribute food using disaster protocols, and we urge USDA to not only approve these plans, but also issue a nationwide waiver.

Allowing food banks to forego the additional burden of verifying recipient eligibility will protect all involved and ensure that vulnerable Americans have access to basic necessities as we continue to fight the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As such, we request that USDA issue a nationwide waiver immediately. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Cory A. Booker, consisting of stylized initials and a surname.

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

A blue ink signature of Robert Menendez, written in a cursive script.

Robert Menendez
United States Senator